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ABSTRACT

Rural schools in South Africa are often found on farms. These "farm schools" are usually erected by the farmer to educate the children of farm laborers. While officially public schools, farm schools are on private property and maintained through private funds. The history of farm schools is closely linked with the political history of South Africa. In 1987, 73 percent of all schools for Blacks were farm schools. The transition to democratic government and extensive educational changes implemented in 1996 resulted in an atmosphere of uncertainty. A study to determine the quality of the work-life of teachers on farm schools in South Africa during this period of change surveyed 60 teachers in 15 farm schools in 1 school district. Findings indicate that teachers in rural schools are generally satisfied with their circumstances and enjoy teaching; teachers are proud of their schools and have good relationships with students; teachers are proud to be teachers; there is a low level of frustration among teachers in rural schools; teachers in farm schools have a sense of belonging to a community; teachers seem to be satisfied with classroom size, physical facilities, and teacher-student ratios; support received by teachers from the principal is insufficient; principals do not play a big role in determining whether teachers experience the organizational climate as positive or negative; principals may experience uncertainty about their positions since the farmer owns the school and students are children of farm employees. (Contains 13 references.) (TD)

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Change and the quality of work-life of teachers in rural schools in South Africa

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CHANGE AND THE QUALITY OF WORK-LIFE OF TEACHERS IN RURAL SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Introduction

In 1996 the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) was promulgated, making provision for two categories of schools. *Public schools* are schools which are funded mainly through public funds, while *independent schools* are funded mainly through private funds (churches, etc.). Although these are the official categories, a large section of schools in South Africa are situated on farms (Department of Education, 1998).

Rural schools in South Africa are usually situated on farms, therefore the term *farm schools* is widely used when reference is made to schools in rural areas. The purpose of farm schools is to provide education to the children of farm labourers (De Koning, 1994) and these schools are usually erected by the farmer. The situation, therefore, is that while farm schools are officially public schools, the school buildings are situated on private property (farms) and the schools are usually maintained through private funds (farmers and/or churches).

Other characteristics regarding farm schools are described by Graaff (1988:21) when he states that it is the farmer on whose land the school is built who decides whether to open a school at all, who carries 50% and more of the construction costs, who manages the school and after a stipulated period, may decide to close it. If the farm is sold, the new owner is under no obligation to continue with the school.

Graaff continues by mentioning that many farmers erect schools for philanthropic reasons. It is seen as a process of upliftment and a commitment to future generations. Gordon (1987:3) notes that in 1954, 13% of all schools for black pupils were situated on farms. The majority of these (83%) were mission (church) aided. The Education Act of 1953, however, enhanced the farmers' control over the schooling of workers' children, and simultaneously decreased the church's influence on children's education on farms.

Prior to the Education Act of 1953, the Cape Province was the only province to provide for farm schools. The 1953 Education Act, made provision to subsidise black state-aided schools (Gordon, 1987:3). By 1987, 73% of all schools administered by the (then) ministry responsible for education for blacks, were farm schools. Approximately 45% of black children of school age on these farms, however, did not attend school.

It is clear that the history of farm (rural) schools in South Africa is closely linked with the political history of the country. As political power changed hands in the early nineties of the previous decade, so did the role of the farm schools (cf. The South African Schools Act mentioned earlier). According to the annual report of the Department of Education (1998) the number of farm schools in certain provinces was still as high as 50%. The total number of farm schools in South Africa is 5508, with 482000 children receiving education in these schools.

The changing of the South African Constitution in 1993 had many implications for education, especially in terms of the racially based groupings within education. Mentz (1999) found that, in general, teachers in South Africa experience uncertainty with regard to the recent changes in education. The furore surrounding the transition to a democratic government, and the resulting changes in the education system, was replaced by an atmosphere of uncertainty. This is not the case in farm schools. New regulations were introduced as a result of the South African Schools Act, including the prohibition of the closing of farm schools by farmers without the permission of the Department of Education. According to Cilliers (1997:48) good relations

between farmers and the Department of Education is of vital importance, especially in view of the fact that the land on which the schools were built, does not belong to the state, but to the farmer. Legislation were introduced to allow all officials of the Department of Education access to farm schools without the permission of the farmer. Furthermore, owners of farm schools and the Department of Education must enter into formal agreements on the maintenance of farm schools and several other issues. Asmal (2000:7) notes that by May 2000 only 10% of these agreements had been finalised.

Ngidi (1995) found that teachers in farm schools have a negative attitude towards their job. They are of the opinion that they have less opportunities than their colleagues in urban schools. It was further found that teachers in farm schools are academically not as well qualified as teachers in urban areas.

Rossouw (1995:65) offers two reasons for the necessity of renewal and change within education. Firstly, change is necessitated by the impact of certain external forces on education, e.g. the growth in numbers of ethnic minorities, or financial considerations. Secondly, change may be considered as necessary due to the internal needs of certain schools, especially the needs of the learners and parents concerned. Whatever the reason for change, the teacher must be prepared to adapt to the process of change.

It is widely accepted that changes in South Africa over the past five years have taken place on the political, economic, moral and institutional levels. This fact, along with uncertainty about rationalization and redeployment of teachers, had a negative influence on the quality of the work-life of teachers. Mass action also became a characteristic of the situation in education during the past 5 years.

In this research, an attempt is made to relate the aspects of change with the quality of the work- life of teachers in rural schools in a school district in South Africa. Inevitably, questions arise about the way in which teachers cope with the changes in society and education, and whether they are adequately equipped and receive the necessary support. The manner in which teachers experience the climate and culture in the school is an important contributing factor to their experience of the quality of work-life. Another aspect that is of significant importance within South African education is the differences that exist between schools. Some schools are well equipped with facilities and other resources, while others are crippled due to the lack of basic means such as electricity and water provision (cf. Bengu, 1998).

Against this background, the need for research into the quality of work-life of teachers on farm schools arose.

The objectives of this research can be summarized as the determination of the quality of the work-life of teachers on farm schools in South Africa in a period of change in the country.

Empirical survey: Background

The questionnaire consisted of 73 questions (over and above the biographical information) and was divided into four main sections. Thirty questions (adapted) were used from the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire - Rutgers Secondary (OCDQ-RS) (Kottkamp, Mulhern & Hoy, 1987). Another thirty-four questions were adapted from the School Cultural Elements Questionnaire (SCEQ) (Maslowski, 1997). The other six questions dealt with aspects such as classroom size and physical facilities. The last three questions measured the teacher's viewpoint of changes in the SA education system in the period from 1994. Teachers had to indicate on a four point scale the degree to which they agree or disagree with a statement that was made.

The questionnaire was implemented in fifteen farm schools in the Potchefstroom District of the North West Department of Education in South Africa. All the teachers (n=60) in these 15 schools participated in the project. The number of 60 teachers gives an indication as to the size of the farm schools, with an average of 4 teachers per school. The analysis of the research results was obtained by using the relevant SAS procedures and methods (SAS Institute, 1985).

The population was unevenly spread with regard to gender, in that 44 female teachers and 16 male teachers provided education in these schools. The majority of teachers (n=47) was in the age group 35-54 years. 34 teachers had more than eleven years of experience as teachers.

Before higher order analyses were performed on the data, the average scores for the 73 questions were analysed. Items obtaining high (usually positive) average scores included those dealing with the relationship between teachers and learners. Teachers also felt very positive about changes in the education system over the past five years.

Regarding the 30 questions dealing with the organizational climate in the school, the percentage of variance explained by 4 factors was 45%, when a varixax rotation (SAS Institute, 1985) was performed on the data. The items clustered within each factor were found to be the same as those in the initial implementation of the OCDQ-RS by Kottkamp, Mulhern & Hoy (1987). It can be concluded that the questions dealing with organizational climate in the schools were valid.

RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

ANALYSIS WITH REFERENCE TO ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE

Determining of the mean scores : Organisational climate

For question B1 to B30 the following mean scores per school type were achieved

(minimum score = 1; maximum score = 4):

Table 1 Average scores : Organisational climate items

Item no	Item	Average scores
B1	The mannerisms of teachers at this school are annoying	1,70
B2	Teachers have a lot of committee requirements	2,24
B3	Teachers spend time after school with children who have individual problems	2,01
B4	Teachers are proud of their school	3,28
B5	The principal sets an example by working hard him/herself	3,23
B6	The principal compliments teachers	3,11
B7	Teacher-principal meetings are dominated by the principal	2,20

B8	Routine duties interfere with teaching	1,94
B9	Teachers interrupt other staff members who are talking in staff meetings	1,66*
B10	The student council has an influence on school policy	2,05

B11	Teachers are friendly with children	3,37**
B12	The principal rules with an iron fist	1,85
B13	The principal monitors everything teachers do	2,38
B14	Administrative paperwork is burdensome at this school	2,20
B15	Teachers help and support one another	3,11
B16	Pupils solve their problems through logical reasoning	2,47
B17	The principal closely checks teacher activities	2,72
B18	The principal is autocratic	1,83
B19	The morale of the teachers is high	2,71
B20	Assigned non-teaching duties are excessive	1,94
B21	The principal goes out of his/her way to help teachers	2,86
B22	The principal explains his/her reasons for criticism to the teachers	2,67
B23	The principal is available after school to help teachers when assistance is needed	2,62
B24	Teachers enjoy working at this school	3,25
B25	The principal uses constructive criticism	2,46
B26	The principal looks out for the personal welfare of the staff members	2,53
B27	The principal supervises teachers closely	2,48
B28	The principal talks more than listens	1,96
B29	Children are trusted to work together without supervision	2,22
B30	Teachers respect the professional competence of their colleagues	3,22

**= highest average score

*= lowest average score

The highest mean score (B11) was attained for an aspect concerning the teachers' relationship with learners. In fact, the opposite holds true in relation to the lowest average scores. The lowest average score (B9) bears relation to the teachers' behavior during meetings and the score points at a positive attitude toward one another.

Factor analysis : Organisational climate

After the average scores for items B1 to B30 were determined, a factor analysis was performed on the data. Factor 1 to 4 explained nearly 50% of the variance during every factor analysis. Thereafter a Varimax - rotation was done on these four factors. The items were grouped in the same way as previous surveys. High factor loads were achieved on the relevant sub-scales. The stability of the factor structure supports the structure validity of the four sub-scales and the meaning given to the structures.

It is therefore given that the factor analysis highlights four factors, namely:

- Principal supportive behaviour (PSB)
- Principal directive behaviour (PDB)
- Teacher engaged behaviour (TEB)
- Teacher frustrated behaviour (TFB)

These four factors were further analysed to eventually determine how different types of schools compare regarding the teachers experiencing the organisational climate of their schools.

Determining of the standardised averages per factor for OCDQ - RS.

Subsequently a standard average score per factor of the OCDQ - RS was determined.

A score of 500 is an average score. The scale is as follows:

Above 600 Very high

551 – 600 High

525 – 550 Above average

511 – 524 Slightly above average

490 – 510 Average

476 – 489 Slightly below average

450 – 475 Below average

400 – 449 Low

Under 400 Very low

Table 2 Average scores per organisational climate factor per type of school

Factor	Mean scores
Principal supportive behavior (PSB)	398
Principal directive behavior (PDB)	463
Teacher engaged behavior (TEB)	574
Teacher frustrated behavior (TFB)	432

It seems that the principals in these schools do not play an active role in the schools. The very low scores for both PSB and PDB indicate that the principal neither supports or rigidly controls the staff. The reason for this may be found in the fact that principals in rural schools have teaching duties equal to that of teachers. The management task of the principal is, therefore, limited.

The high scores for TEB behavior indicates that teachers work well together and they support one another. The low lever of frustration (TFB) is a positive sign. Teachers enjoy their work and they have sufficient time to concentrate on their primary task of teaching.

Determining the reliability of the questionnaire with regard to organisational climate

In order to determine the reliability of the measuring instrument within a South African context in which it was used, the Cronbach-alpha reliability coefficient was used (cf. Cronbach, 1949:160).

The reliability of each factor of the OCDQ-RS was determined. The alpha (or reliability) coefficient of the different factors is as follows:

Table 3 Reliability of the questionaire : alpha coefficient of the four sub-scales

	Alpha coefficient
PSB	0,74
PDB	0,77
TEB	0,78
TFB	0,67

It can be deduced that the OCDQ-RS is a reliable instrument for the schools used in this investigation.

ANALYSIS WITH REGARD TO ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Determining the averages per item : Organisational culture

In analysing the questions dealing with organisational culture in schools (questions B31 to B64) the average scores for every question is determined. The result is as follows (minimum = 1; maximum = 4):

Table 4 Averages: Organisation Culture items

Item no	Item	Average scores
B31	I am proud to be an educator	3,45**
B32	Teachers have an understanding of how to support one another	3,20
B33	Items for discussion at meetings usually come from the same people	2,22
B34	Expressions of the school's future vision reflect staff consensus in this school	2,67
B35	The principal and deputies are the most influential staff members	2,53
B36	Educational programs contribute to the improvement of the quality of life in our society	2,91
B37	I spend time in personal reflection about my work	2,79
B38	I am unsure of how strongly I should express my own opinions with colleagues	2,07
B39	There is debate in meetings	2,47
B40	We have discussions about a common vision for the school's future	2,86
B41	The creative potential of students is realised in this school	2,80
B42	Social skills of students are developed in this school	3,00
B43	Teachers make an effort to maintain positive relationships with colleagues	3,30**
B44	We work together to implement the decisions of meetings	3,13

B45	The principal and deputies encourage the professional growth of teachers	3,08
B46	I have a clear understanding of how I can contribute to realising the future vision of the school	3,01
B47	Teachers learn from one another	3,25
B48	My professional decisions are supported by colleagues	3,08
B49	We discuss what should be taught in particular curricula or courses	2,89
B50	Members of the school management show a genuine concern for me as a person	2,93
B51	I am receptive to advice from colleagues about my teaching	3,06
B52	We are willing to help one another when problems arise	3,28**
B53	Teaching methods and strategies are discussed by teachers in this school	2,95
B54	We have recognised procedures for deciding on new projects	2,57
B55	The principal and deputies give teachers sufficient "space" to get on with their work	3,17
B56	I work towards achieving the school's vision	3,22
B57	We believe that every child can learn	3,38
B58	We encourage one another to exercise our professional judgement	3,18
B59	We compare how we assess student achievement	3,12
B60	Teachers are unified in working towards the school's future vision	3,00
B61	Members of the school management generate a personal commitment from teachers that ensures the success of innovations	2,45*

B62	Improvements in student achievement are rewarded	3,10
B63	I still find new ways to improve my teaching	3,44**
B64	Student behavior is discussed by teachers	3,25**

**= Highest average scores for each type of school*= Lowest average scores for each type of school

Concerning the **highest** average scores, it becomes evident that items that relate to **teachers' professional work** have the highest scores. It is clear that teacher are proud to be educators (B31), they maintain positive relations with colleagues (B43), they assist each other (B52) and they try to find new ways to improve their teaching (B63).

Concerning the **lowest** average scores, question B38 is not considered for this purpose, a low score for this question rather indicates a positive than negative response. An aspect that causes concern, is that question B61 received the lowest negative response of all the questions. In question B61 it is asked of teachers in what degree the management of the schools generate a personal commitment from teachers. Therefore teachers do not experience much interest in them as persons from management of their schools. Other questions obtaining low mean scores, deal with the debate taking place in meeting (B39) and the existence of recognised procedures for deciding on new projects (B54).

ANALYSIS WITH RESPECT TO CLASSROOM SIZE AND PHYSICAL FACILITIES (QUESTION B65 TO B70)

Determination of the averages per item : Classroom size and physical facilities

The average values for the six questions dealing with aspects of classroom size and physical facilities are determined as follows. The result being (minimum = 1; maximum = 4):

Table 5 Average scores for questions B65 to B70

Item no	Item	Average scores
B65	There are opportunities for personnel to improve their knowledge, skills and performance in this school	3,18
B66	There is classroom space adequate for instruction in this school	2,47
B67	Adequate maintenance and custodial care of the building are evident at this school	2,38

B68	There are adequate spaces available for administration, counselling, clinics, etc. at this school	2,25
B69	The teacher-student ratio in this school is conducive to student learning	2,77
B70	Instructional programmes meet the needs of students who will be living and working in the 21st century	2,64

A positive aspect is that teachers feel that they have opportunities for professional growth in these schools (B65). Seen against the background of other schools in South Africa, teachers seem to be satisfied with the classroom space (B68) and the teacher-student ratio (B69).

ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE OF THE CHANGES IN SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS

The objective of questions C1 to C3

The objective of questions C1 to C3 was to determine teachers' point of view of their work-life in the school, to evaluate teachers' experience of the changes in the South African education system and to determine how teachers feel about teaching as a lifelong profession.

Determining the average scores per item: changes in education, work-life and teaching as lifelong profession

Hence, the average scores for the three questions (C1 to C3) are given:

Table 6 Average score for question C1

Question	Average score
How do you experience your work as teacher at this school? (very negative = 1; very positive = 9)	7,88

Table 7 Average score for question C2

Question	Average
How did you experience educational changes in the country over the past 4 years? (very negative = 1; very positive = 9)	6,61

Table 8 Average score for question C3

Question	Average
How do recent educational changes affect your view of teaching as a lifelong profession? (very negative = 1; very negative = 9)	6,13

It is clear from Table 6 that teachers are not unhappy in their schools.

From Table 7, it is clear that teachers have experienced the changes in the South African education system as positive over the past four years.

The lowest average scores for the three questions in section C are given in Table 8, although it can be said that teachers are not that negative about teaching as a lifelong profession.

FINDINGS

Findings relating to the literature study

- Rural schools have a long history in the context of the South African education system. Rural schools developed along different racial lines. As the white population became more urbanised, rural schools either closed or became schools for black learners. Commercial farmers took control of these schools and built new schools to such an extent that some 4600 rural schools exist today.
- Professional development is an important condition while change and renewal take place in education. This development must however not fulfil an ad hoc need within education, but must be part of the teacher's career.
- There are currently developments in education that can be considered as crucial events in the work-life of teachers in rural schools. The implementation of outcomes based education and the redeployment of teachers can undoubtedly be considered as critical events.
- It is necessary to establish a positive culture in all South African schools, including farm schools. Transformational leadership is necessary in schools to lead teachers and pupils into the new millennium. Within this context it is important to create a school identity.
- The needs of pupils and those of the teachers are not two separate aspects when change and the quality of work-life of the teacher are concerned. The teacher's positive experience

of the quality of work-life is founded in the positive relationships with the pupils.

- Uncertainty regarding authoritative positions and responsibility are already characteristics of South African education in a time of change. The aspect of "emotional investment" which each teacher in South Africa in the new dispensation had to make, must be supported by school principals and educational authorities.

- Supporting infrastructure and communication are critically important for positive change in education.

- Stability is one of the biggest determinants of job satisfaction. Changes in education do not necessarily have to have an impact on the stability the teacher experiences in his/her work environment.

- Professional relationships in education are important factors that influence the job satisfaction of the teacher. Proper relationships between teachers and principals, and teachers and educational authorities are important for the establishment of a motivated work environment.

- Quality assurance is necessary in order to scoreer the negative effect of change in education. Mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that high standards are maintained.

Findings regarding the empirical investigation

- Generally, teachers in rural schools are satisfied with their circumstances and enjoy teaching. Furthermore, they are proud of their schools and there are good relationships with the learners. The amount of support received by the teachers from the principal is, however not sufficient. The principal does not play a big role as a factor determining whether the teacher experiences the organisational climate as positive or negative.

- It is comforting to know that the teachers in rural schools are proud to be teachers.

- There is no real reason for concern when cognisance is taken of those aspects regarding the size of classrooms, physical facilities and teacher-learner ratios.

- The low level of frustration among teachers in rural schools is a positive sign.

- With regard to organizational climate, questions should be raised about the lack of support from principals in farm schools. Given the unique situation that the farmer is the "owner" of the school and the learners are usually children of farm employees the principals in farm schools may experience uncertainty about their exact positions. Teachers in farm schools have a sense of belonging to a community.

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